

SB 129 - Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

SUPPORT

January 31, 2022

Senator William C. Smith, Jr. and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

The National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) requests your support of SB 129 which will establish the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program administered by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to provide access to legal representation for certain covered individuals detained in the United States within the state of Maryland in certain covered judicial or administrative immigration proceedings where an individual is subject to removal from the United States; and establishing the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Special Fund to provide funding to implement access to legal representation in immigration proceedings.

NASW is a national organization of social workers representing over 120,000 social workers. The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living. By passing the Access of Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program you will be creating a more just and humane society in Maryland.

Social workers across the state of Maryland who work with immigrants, in particular the Latinx community, have been hearing stories from their clients of the fears they face every day. They are afraid to ask for help from any government agency for fear of jeopardizing their immigration case or of being turned over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). They are often afraid to send their children to school, seek health care, or ask for food from the Food Bank. They have unprecedented rates of depression and anxiety. They face discrimination in employment, housing, and in public. They experience threats from neighbors, co-workers and bosses. They are terrified to call the police for help. We cannot create a just society if a large

portion of the community lives in fear. By passing the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program you can give them the gift of the ability to seek help.

NASW-MD urges you to **pass SB 129** and create a safer, more inclusive Maryland. Thank you for all you do to reach those ends.

Mary Beth DeMartino, MSW, LCSW-C

Executive Director, NASW-MD

Philip A. Pratt, MSW

Board Member at Large, NASW-MD

Co-Chair, Legislative Committee

Chair, Immigration Committee